Ted Kennedy: A Look at the

SENATOR TED KENNEDY: The Career Behind the Image. By Theo Lippman Jr. Norton. 296 pp. $9.95.

By NORMAN J. ORNSTEIN

NO AMERICAN TODAY, with the possible exception of Richard Nixon, can elicit in people the strong emotions of hatred or adoration that Edward Moore Kennedy can. Whether it is the Kennedy name, his resemblance to his late brothers, or his own political actions, Ted Kennedy is a dominant political figure in America, and, at the age of 43, will continue to be a likely presidential possibility well into the 1990s.

Kennedy receives more than his share of attention in the mass media — in the society sections as well as the news and editorial pages — but much of it centers simply on the question, "Will he or won't he be a candidate?" There has been very little systematic attention paid to Kennedy as a legislator, as a policy-maker in his own right. To fill that gap, Theo Lippman Jr., an editorial writer for the Baltimore Sun, spent a year carefully researching Kennedy's performance in the Senate. *Senator Ted Kennedy: The Career Behind the Image* is the result.

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Kennedy has spent more than 13 years in the Senate. Elected in 1962 to fill the unexpired term of his brother Jack, Kennedy first had to survive a bitter Democratic primary battle with Edward McCormack, nephew of the Speaker of the House. The highlight of that primary fight was a debate in which McCormack shouted, "If his name was Edward Moore, with his qualifications, with your qualifications, Teddy, if it was Edward Moore, your candidacy would be a joke." In *Senator Ted Kennedy*, the author basically tries to see what Kennedy has accomplished in the 13 years since that primary — whether, in other words, a Senator Edward Moore would be prominently mentioned in the presidential sweepstakes.

Lippman's book is not chronological — he does not trace Kennedy's Senate career from his early days in office to his "arrival" as a senior member of the institution (Kennedy is effectively next in line to be chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee.) At various points, though, Lippman does discuss the evolution of Kennedy as senator; these pages provide the most interesting reading in the book. Unlike his brothers Jack and Robert, Ted Kennedy entered the Senate as a model freshman. Jack, to Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson's frustration, was never there; he was always off running for president. Bobby felt encumbered by the Senate, and had none of the expected reverence for the institution. Teddy, on the other hand, was soft-spoken, hard-working, and able to get along well with the senior heavyweights, such as Richard Russell of Georgia and James Eastland of Mississippi. It was the respect of his colleagues, won

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through his hard work out of the limelight, that enabled Kennedy to win the position of Democratic Whip in 1969, upsetting incumbent Russell Long of Louisiana.

Unfortunately, Kennedy's devotion to the needs of the Senate melted away after Chappaquiddick, and his failure to meet the duties of the whip's position cost him the office two years later, when he was ousted by Robert Byrd. This year has brought evidence that Kennedy is returning his attention to inter-

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nal Senate processes, however — Lippman briefly describes Kennedy's key role on the Steering Committee, at the beginning of the 94th Congress, in thwarting conservative James Allen's attempt to secure a Judiciary Committee assignment, and securing key posts for several liberals.

All in all, however, *Senator Ted Kennedy* is less concerned with Kennedy's role in the Senate than it is with what *impact* Kennedy has had in various policy areas. Lippman is constantly trying to assess what would have happened if Kennedy had not intervened, or devoted time to an issue. Lippman does this for the areas of Vietnam, refugees, education, the draft, the 18-year-old vote, military spending, campaign finance, tax policy, oversight of the Civil Aeronautics Board, foreign policy, Watergate, and health. In all of these disparate areas, Lippman concludes that Kennedy as senator has had a major — and beneficial — impact. Among other things, Kennedy used his chairmanship of the Refugee Subcommittee on Judiciary to highlight the social and humanitarian problems of our intervention in Vietnam, and to keep public attention focused on Biafra and Bangladesh — all of which, according to State Department and AID spokesmen quoted by Lippman, resulted in more humanitarian aid than the United States would otherwise have provided. Kennedy worked to eliminate the poll tax in 1965, worked for draft reform in the late 1960s, was the prime mover in legislating the lowered voting age, and has been a major figure in health policy, especially in pushing for a national health policy, especially in pushing for a national health plan.

Lippman portrays Kennedy as both an innovator and a hard worker. One staff member to a liberal senator commented on Kennedy's efforts in the tax-cut bill which Congress passed last March: "Let me give Kennedy an unsolicited endorsement—I was impressed with Kennedy. I had heard he was flighty. But of all the liberals only he and Humphrey were on the floor every day, and he was probably there more hours than Humphrey. He knew the legislation, too. He obviously had done his homework."

To some critics, Kennedy's seeming suc-

cesses in the Senate are largely due to his staff. But, as Lippman details in a chapter called "Government in Exile," the ability to select and utilize quality staff in an important talent itself, which some prominent politicians, including Gerald Ford, seem to lack. (Johnny Carson joked on the "Tonight" show recently that they had to cancel the White House Christmas nativity party because President Ford couldn't find three wise men.)

With few exceptions, Lippman's portrait of Kennedy's Senate career is strongly positive, perhaps too positive. Another observer could examine the same record and see Kennedy as an unthinking radical, rather than one on the cutting edge of progressive social change, or as a dilettante rather than a far-ranging and creative legislator. Lippman glosses over Kennedy's withdrawal from Senate activities in 1969-1970, and the highly publicized 1969 trip to Alaska, to investigate Eskimo poverty, when Kennedy reportedly drank heavily and accomplished little. By focusing narrowly on Kennedy's actions in influencing policy, and not always placing them in the broader context, Lippman underestimates the crucial roles played in campaign finance, tax reform, the ABM, and other legislative battles by senators such as Frank Church, Charles Mathias, Dick Clark, John Sherman Cooper, and Phil Hart. But with all these qualifications in mind, *Senator Ted Kennedy* is a thorough and well-documented record of a hard-working and effective legislator. Even if his name were Edward Moore, this would be a man with a legitimate claim to national attention. □